



NATIONAL VITAL STATISTICS SYSTEM

WHAT IS THE PUBLIC HEALTH PROBLEM?

Policy makers and program managers need vital records -- birth and death statistics -- to set policy and direct public health programs. The National Vital Statistics System (NVSS) is a primary source of this information. It produces the nation's official vital statistics. NVSS is, however, decentralized. The collection and registration of vital events are governed by the laws of 57 states and registration areas. Vital records and reports originate with hospitals, physicians, and funeral directors. Records are compiled by the states and forwarded to CDC. CDC works with the states to ensure consistency in certificate content, data quality, and timeliness of reporting.

WHAT HAS CDC ACCOMPLISHED?

NVSS provides timely data on the number of teen births, prenatal care and birthweight, risk factors for adverse pregnancy outcomes, firearm-related mortality in teens, infant mortality rates, leading causes of death, life expectancy, and firearm related mortality, to public health officials at the national, state, and local levels, and in the private sector.

Examples of program in action:

- **Life expectancy** at birth for white males is 74.8 years, and 68.2 for black males.
- The data show a reduction in the **deaths due to heart disease** (3.7 percent) and **cancer** (0.8 percent) in 2000. These two diseases accounted for more than 1.2 million deaths, more than one-half of all deaths in 2000.
- The **infant mortality rate** for all races has declined from 9.2 infant deaths per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 6.9 in 2000.
- The **infant mortality rate** for non-Hispanic white infants is 5.7 per 1,000 live births and for Hispanic infants, 5.6, compared with 13.6 for non-Hispanic black infants.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

To address 21st century data needs with 21st century technology, CDC plans to invest in fundamental improvements in the nation's vital statistics system. These improvements will include:

- Implement new national model certificates of birth, death and fetal death events to improve data quality and update the content of these data sources to reflect new needs such as changing classification of race/ethnicity, and new and emerging concerns in maternal and infant health and public health.
- Develop a reengineered web-based vital statistics system that harmonizes with the Public Health Information Network. This process involves the initial recording of birth, death, and fetal death records via electronic systems in hospitals and funeral homes using standardized guidelines developed by the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS); transmission to state authorities and NCHS; and the translation into information systems for statistical analyses and public health surveillance.

For more information on this and other CDC programs, visit www.cdc.gov/programs.

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